school leavers as well as retirees, part-time workers and the unemployed. How we communicate our work to different people and how we negotiate difference and dissent among ourselves are recurring questions. We are based in a small city; while there are fewer existing networks of solidarity than might exist in larger cities, there is also an intimacy and a proximity that provide possibilities for associational networks that might be diffused in larger cities. Most of us work full-time and cannot give the time to the SSC that we would like to. Without the material basis on which to work and study full-time at the SSC, we have to think creatively about the form and nature of education practised within the SSC. Do we have courses, semesters, students, teachers and assessments? What do they look like? How does it all work?

So, from the start, the SSC was a political project that took a particular organizational form. We are not all Marxists; nevertheless some of us have been inspired by Marx’s recognition that workers’ co-operatives ‘attack the groundwork’ of capitalism. As ‘knowledge workers’ in the ‘knowledge economy’, control over the production of knowledge – and its institutional forms and organizing principles – is what gives the SSC its criticality, allowing for experimentation with different ways of teaching, learning, reflecting on our past, and creating our future. Recognizing ourselves as social individuals, our organizing principle is that we are producers of knowledge who own and control the means of our own knowledge production.

We also therefore recognize that cooperation can’t be sustained in isolation and that developing solidarity with other co-operatives, locally, nationally and internationally, must be part of our long-term vision. We’ve participated in the first Free University Network meetings and invited the People’s Political Economy project from Oxford to share their experience at our second AGM. We’ve also been in talks with the Co-operative College about developing a model for cooperative higher education.

It was always our intention that the SSC would become international in scope. We imagined that ‘associate members’ living anywhere in the world would want to join the SSC and carry it forward, helping develop cooperative higher education and acting as peers to the members who run it day to day. Associates might support the SSC financially, but also through offering to assess work, provide specialist advice, and develop the cooperative model itself. As we write, we’re trying to reach out for new members to work and study with us. We also hope to inspire thinking about the potential of the SSC as a model for something similar in your local area, which reflects your own scholarly interests.

Members of the Social Science Centre,
Lincoln, http://socialsciencecentre.org.uk

Benjamin’s international reception
18–20 September 2013, Berlin

Gudrun Schwarz, the main organizer of the recent symposium of the Walter Benjamin Archive in the Akademie der Künste, has been thinking about it – she says – for eight years, talking about it for six, and savouring its practical organization for the last four. Cai-Yong Wang from Fudan University, Shanghai, opened by giving a summary of Benjamin’s reception in China. The first translation (his own, of the *Artwork* essay) appeared in 1992, selling 3,000 copies in the first two months. Since then Benjamin has become one of the most widely read Western thinkers in China. Wang talked of Benjamin’s *Strom* (current), referring both to his rapid academic accreditation and to the thematics of modernity and modernization that constitute the main attraction for the ‘Chinese audience’.

In China, as in some other countries, Benjamin tends however, as Wang acknowledged, to be translated from English editions.

Seong Man Choi, from the Ewha University of Seoul, addressed Benjamin’s reception in South Korea. Choi, who among others is working on a forthcoming fifteen-volume edition of Benjamin’s collected works (eight of which are already available), told us that the Americans brought Benjamin to South Korea after the Korean War: the first translations of the *Artwork* essay date back to the 1970s, when the Frankfurt School also reached Seoul. Whereas subsequent globalization was accompanied by a loss of interest both in the humanities and in Benjamin, the influence of philosophers like Žižek, Agamben and Butler refocused attention
on his work. Hence, although the humanities and the social sciences inhabit different realms and can find no middle ground in which to marry the conservative expertise of the one with the politicization of the other, the theme of Benjamin’s concept of Gewalt (violence/power) exploded in the Korea of the new millennium, according to Choi. This was not the Benjamin that Korea had initially read: as in China, he arrived first as signifier of modernity and an apologist for new media.

The last panel of the day also concerned Korea, with an informative talk by Saein Park. The main object of Park’s presentation was a comparison between Choi’s translations and previous versions. Among the examples she mentioned, one citation from ‘The Task of the Translator’ is especially significant: ‘if the sentence is the wall before the language of the original, literalness is the arcade [Arkade].’ Choi translates ‘Arkade’ with hong ye moon (literally ‘door in the rainbow’ – meaning ‘arch’).

Kazuko Okamoto has recently joined the project to translate the second edition of Benjamin’s collected writings into Japanese. The first volume of the first edition in fifteen volumes appeared in 1969, which surprisingly preceded publication in any other country. Yet, moving from a Marxist and new media Benjamin to a post-structuralist or theological one, Okamoto’s presentation on the second day can best be summarized with a comment she received at the end of her talk: ‘I can’t see any difference between the [history of the] Japanese and the German reception of Benjamin.’

Asli Odman, from the Mimar Sinan University of Istanbul, began her talk by stressing the recent political riots and repressions in Gezi Park. The project to rebuild on the site of the Taksim Military Barracks and transform it into an ‘Ottoman’ mega-shopping mall, thereby wounding the core of the city, has not been accepted by the population and brought about the recent protests. A turning point in social awareness was the discovery that the site of the park was originally an Armenian cemetery. Thus, in a Benjaminian way, memory connects to revolt. The first translation of Benjamin appeared in 1961, in a very specialist journal and for a very small audience. But the first real impact came with his Brecht essays, the translation of which started in 1975. In Turkey there is still no translation of Benjamin’s entire œuvre, and most of the critics and thinkers reflecting on Benjamin’s ideas have read him in either English or French.

Ahmed Farouk, who spoke in the following panel, has translated Berlin Childhood around 1900 into Arabic. Egypt was, however, the only African country represented, and the programme moved shortly after to Iran. Unfortunately Sina Chegini, of the University of Tehran, was unable to attend the conference for visa-related reasons. Sabine Jainski agreed to speak in his stead, reading a paper he had hastily written the previous night. We learned that Benjamin arrived with the Frankfurt School in Iran in the 1990s, but has only begun to be translated more actively since 2000. The ‘Critique of Violence’ has garnered particular interest because of Žižek’s writings. The 2009 Iranian Green movement can, it was suggested, be connected to messianic politics, messianic violence and attempts at emancipation from capitalism.

The last panel of the day featured Uwe Schoor and Griselda Mársico from Buenos Aires, with whom the attention of the conference shifted to Benjamin’s reception in Latin America. Karla Pinhel Ribeiro from the University of São Paulo began her talk on the third day by showing some pictures taken on her campus, where the police had arrested two students for smoking marijuana. The police car was completely surrounded by students, some of whom were holding and reading from ‘Critique of Violence’. Next, Karl Pressler insisted on the necessity of sending his students to the Benjamin archive rather than simply fighting over politico-theoretical questions. According to Pressler, Brazil seems condemned to useless debates at a very low theoretical level. Pressler mentioned that José Guillerm Merquior, to whom Benjamin’s Brazilian reception has been strongly indebted, was a diplomat and, like many others of that generation, often had an antagonistic relation to the academy. He did not forget to mention, however, the importance of Roberto Schwarz and Michael Löwy.

The final panel of the conference focused on Mexico. Ignacio M. Sánchez Prado explained that Benjamin arrived in Mexico with Popper and Habermas: the reception of his work was thus extremely conservative. In this context, Bolívar Echeverría, who had connections to the Zapatistas, stood out, especially with his famous La mirada del angel, where he polemically adapts Benjamin’s Angel of History to Mexican reality, so that a rather anti-modern angel appears with macabre symbols such as a scythe.

Wizisla remarked at the end of the conference that he had been happy to hear that Benjamin generated such political energy in countries worldwide, while so much of the West seems increasingly indifferent. Not only has the copyright on Benjamin’s texts expired but it is very evident that any exclusively German attempt at patenting their DNA is inevitably doomed.

Elisa Santucci-Nitis